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WASHINGTON
James Reston

S.O.S! Men Overboard!

WASHINGTON
*I'm tired of Love: I'm still more
tired of Rhyme.*

*But Money gives me pleasure all
the time. — Hilaire Belloc*

A funny thing happened to President Reagan on his way to "four more years" in the White House. Just when he had set the Ship of State on the "right" course, his loyal conservative crew began diving from the poop deck.

It wasn't a case of mutiny on the bounty, but the lure of bounty on the shore.

The first to go overboard was the President's own lawyer, Attorney General William French Smith. Then Ed Meese left the upper deck for the Justice Department, but hasn't quite made it.

This left Judge Clark, who always seems to be leaving the State Department or the White House or the Interior Department for somewhere else, and this time he decided over the Christmas holidays that it was time to go back to California.

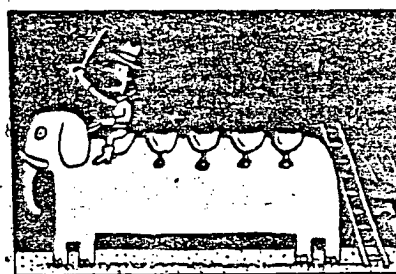
Finally, Mike Deaver, the doorkeeper and stage manager of the Oval Office, concluded sadly that he couldn't live happily in Washington on \$72,000 a year, even with his wife's lucrative assistance, and took refuge, at \$200,000 a year, in a local publicity establishment.

How to explain that the first to jump ship even before the start of the second cruise were the Skipper's first officers and closest friends? The short answer is that they have always been more interested in Reagan than in revolution, in helping their buddy when a second term seemed like fun. The first four years were a lark, but another four years in Washington would be a sentence. Attorney General Smith lives in a hotel, and even George Shultz rents a furnished house.

Obviously, Messrs. Smith, Clark and Deaver don't think the battle of the budget is over or, despite the President's spectacular election victory, that the conservative realignment of American politics is assured.

But the Republicans, or at least these California Republicans, are not like the Democrats, who think of politics as a life career and wear themselves out in the process, as they have done in recent years with disastrous results.

The Republicans, in contrast, seem to think of politics not as a career, but as a temporary adventure or noblesse oblige duty to be performed for a



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while before they go home to better business and a prominent notice in "Who's Who."

The President has lost Howard Baker as the Republican leader in the Senate, which is a serious loss, but he retains Jim Baker, who is restless, as chief of staff in the White House. So he's one Baker down and maybe one to go.

As for Mr. Reagan's departing conservative buddies, with respect for their temporary efforts, they are eminently disposable and replaceable. In his first term, the President chose the best of his friends; now he has a chance to replace them with the best of his party.

As for "Poor Mike" Deaver, now to be "Rich Mike," all he has lost is his office but not his influence in the White House. He will be as close to the President and Nancy Reagan as her telephone, only now he will be paid more for his services.

The conservatives have clearly lost some influence in the White House and in the Senate, with Bob Dole in charge for at least the next couple of years, but they still have some powerful advocates in the Cabinet.

They will have to get rid of Raymond Donovan at Labor, though he's not a convicted crook, because he's an embarrassment. But the conservatives can still count on Cappy Weinberger, the verbal gunslinger, and

other pearls at the Pentagon, not forgetting Casey at the bat in the C.I.A.

Even so, it's interesting why the President let his old buddies jump. Certainly not because he thought they were deserting a sinking ship. He could have held them, because they respect him, merely by insisting that he needed them and didn't want to be left in the lurch with a lot of pragmatic bakers and candlestick makers at his side.

This he didn't do. Maybe because he understood their longing for home, which he himself must think about sometimes in the night.

Also, preparing to take the vows and state the purposes of a second term, he is clearly the most successful and powerful politician in a changing world and may very well take a different show on the road, with different themes and different advisers.

For his good companions are tired of Washington, where the sun doesn't shine, but money gives them pleasure all the time. □